

A Snake In The Grass

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Summary: Is there a traitor amongst the League Against Voldemort?

No, it's not about Pettigrew. Set several years after 'The Whomping Willow.'

A Snake In The Grass

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A Snake in the Grass

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_ Something that's not about Remus for a change. It is connected with my other stories, but stands alone. _

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James Potter leafed through the papers and scribbled some notes on the parchment beside him. The house was extremely quiet, although he knew some members of the League were working in the other rooms. He read the heading on the paper he was using with a half-smile. _The League Against Voldemort. Head â€" Albus Dumbledore_. It had been founded only a short while after Voldemort appeared, and when he left Hogwarts, Dumbledore had asked James to be a member. Whilst he was very proud of it, sometimes the paperwork drove him crazy.

Putting his quill down with a sigh, he went to the window and looked out at the clear night sky. The full moon darted in and out of the wind-whipped clouds, and he wished he could be with Remus and Sirius, but he hadn't realised the work would take this long. A few stars were visible on the eastern horizon, and he stared up at them,

dreaming, wondering where Lily was tonight. Her job took her around the country all the time, and he only saw her a few times every month. The silence in the house was beginning to unnerve him, and he deliberately made some noise as he lit a fire and returned to his work.

From the room below him, a voice came drifting up.

'â€| couldn't speak to you earlier â€| no, it's fine â€| yes â€|'

Absently, he wondered who was at the other end of this conversation.

' â€| yes, I've got them â€| here â€| Pumpernickel, e-mail, tweak â€|got that?'

James nearly jumped out of his skin. Those were the code words to get into the League's office in Diagon Alley. What on earth was going on?

'â€| no, that's all â€| they were correct this morning â€| I hope so â€| yes. Goodbye.'

He shook himself. The silence must be getting to him. It was probably only someone passing the message along to one of the other members.

Still â€|. He left the room and went downstairs to the entrance hall, and looked at the little, constantly-updating poster that showed where all the League members were. It had been an invention of Sirius', though he had never told anyone how he had learnt the way of making it. The only other person in this office was Severus Snape. He gave a sigh. There would be no use asking who he had been talking to, he'd only get his head bitten off. Snape was always very reticent when asked about what he did for the League.

Then he looked back at the little map. Sirius and Remus were together, in the hills outside Much Muckle, where Sirius lived. They were having fun there, and here he was summarising Ministry of Magic reports on the incident of February 7th at a Muggle university. It wasn't even very interesting.

He made himself a cup of tea, and went back up to his work. Snape's office was now silent, and James decided he was probably over-reacting.

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He spent the night in the office, in one of the spare rooms. The owl rapping on the window woke him at dawn.

'Mmph â€" go away,' he muttered. The owl persisted, and with a groan he opened the window. Two objects came shooting in the window â€" a _Daily Prophet_, _delivered free to all League members, and a letter. He shot a glance at the _Prophet's_ headline before opening the letter. Then, as it sank in to his drowsy mind, he stared wildly at the _Prophet_.

'_You-Know-Who Attacks Ministry Offices._' Feverishly, he read the

story. Somehow, Voldemort had found out how to get into a safe house â€" the one in Diagon Alley â€" and he had found what the paper described as 'important information' about the Ministry's defence programme. Nobody had been hurt, as the house had been empty at the time. James flipped through the rest of the paper, but there was nothing else of interest happening.

Surely â€" surely â€"? No, don't think it, he told himself. He had absolutely no proof, it would be ridiculous to suspect him on such tiny evidence. There were probably hundreds of ways Voldemort could have got into the safe house without the passwords. They knew so little about the capabilities of the Dark Arts, he thought regretfully. Mostly because people who found out a lot about them tended to become corrupted. And one of the aims of the League was to understand how Voldemort's magic worked, for then they would have a much stronger base for their work.

He took out the letter. It was from Lily. For a while, James forgot his concerns about Snape, and the Dark Arts, as he read Lily's words, imagining she was there with him instead of somewhere in Ireland.

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His office door swung open. 'Hey, Prongs, we missed you last night.' Sirius was standing framed by the doorway, his face flushed. James started out of his reverie.

'Oh â€" hi, Sirius. Sorry. I was busy with all this stuff.' He gestured vaguely at the heaped desk.

'Is something wrong? You look all sort of worried.'

'Well, I don't knowâ€". Have you seen the news?'

'What news?' James passed him the _Daily Prophet _wordlessly. Sirius skimmed through it.

He frowned. 'Lucky there wasn't anyone there. It could have been a lot worse.'

Both remembered the tragedy at the Prewett's home three months ago. James wondered whether to tell Sirius about his concerns.

'I'm a bit worried,' he began hesitantly. 'You see, last night I heard Snape talking to someone â€"on one of those Muggle telephone things â€" and he was telling them the passwords for the Diagon Alley office.'

Sirius' eyes sparked with anger. 'I knew it! I always knew he was a traitor. Sneaking Slytherins, never up to any good. I don't understand why Dumbledore asked him to join the League, I really don't. He's too trusting. Always sees the good in people, or thinks he does.' His voice softened a little, as if he were talking about a lovable child rather than the awe-inspiring headmaster of Hogwarts, but then, Sirius had never been particularly respectful.

James sighed. 'Well, I know you don't like him â€" if it comes to that, I can't say I'm that fond of him either, but there's absolutely no proof. He could have been talking to anyone.'

'What do you mean, no proof? You hear him telling the passwords to someone, and that same day Voldemort breaks in! How much proof do you need?'

'Oh, I don't know. I can't believe any of the League could be traitors, I really can't. We all are risking everything for it, and Dumbledore knows us all inside out.'

'Well, if you're so bothered, why don't we just ask him first? Ask him who he was talking to? Is he still here?' Sirius' voice had taken on a resigned tone.

'Well â€" I guess that wouldn't be a bad idea. I think he spent the night here as well; he's probably downstairs or something.'

Severus Snape was indeed downstairs, reading the Daily Prophet with a crooked smile.

'Good morning,' James said politely. Standing beside him, Sirius glared.

Severus acknowledged them with a curt nod.

'Terrible news, isn't it?' continued James, trying to be civil. Severus nodded again.

'So, how do you think Voldemort found out the passwords?' Sirius demanded, bored with the small talk.

Severus shrugged. 'Any number of ways. I thought you were the expert on the Dark Arts.' Sirius' expression darkened.

Before he could say any more, James interrupted. 'Severus, I overheard a telephone conversation you had last night, and you were telling someone the code words for that office. Can you explain this?'

'Eavesdropping, were you?' said Severus in his soft voice. 'I'm not answerable to you, Potter. I know what I'm doing. Now, if you'd like to stop interrogating me, I'd be very grateful.'

James and Sirius glanced at each other, but Severus had gone back to reading his paper. After a second of standing there motionlessly, James turned to go back, Sirius following him reluctantly.

When they had gone, Severus walked cat-footed to the door and went out. The mobile telephone he carried rang, and he fiddled with the buttons for a moment until he could answer it.

'Yes? â€| yes, I'm alone â€| it what? What do you mean, it was no good?' His voice was a little tenser than usual, but only someone who knew him well would have noticed. 'It's all over the papers that you've got all sorts of useful information â€| no â€| no â€| well, how was I to know? I'm only the messenger â€| look, I'll do what I can â€| sorry, I've got to go now â€| yes, bye.'

He pressed some more buttons, and the phone gave a beep and began to play a strange tinny-sounding tune. Severus swore, and pressed the button again. It played another tune. He took out his wand and

pointed it at the machine. 'Ludditalis!' he barked, and with a squawk that the designers had certainly not intended, the mobile phone shut itself off.

He gazed into the distance for a moment, a strange expression crossing his face, before setting off down the road.

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In his lonely room, Severus Snape gazed at the ceiling, unable to sleep. He was worried, worried far more than he should be. He was Snape, he wasn't supposed to worry or to have doubts. He had practically made a career out of it. The shadowy ceiling did not give him any help. If he misjudged something, it would not only be his life that was at risk. Everything he held dear, and that was not much, would be in danger. He gave a shiver of nervous apprehension at the thought of the burning eyes he had seen. Not many people survived being face-to-face with Lord Voldemort.

He would have been proud of himself, but he was never pleased with his own achievements. Always he knew he could have done better, he could have put more effort into it. Even if it was something that impressed every other person who heard of it, he knew it was not good enough.

He shook himself. This was silly, wasting time. He closed his eyes, willing sleep to come. It didn't.

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'This is such a stupid idea,' hissed James to Sirius from under the Invisibility Cloak. Sirius took an unwise step. 'That's my foot!'

'Sorry.'

'Stay on your side.' Both their voices were taut.

'Where d'you think he's going?'

'How should I know? Oh â€¦ what a waste of time.'

'Why are you in such a bad mood?' asked Sirius, sounding not much more cheerful himself.

'Why do you think? It's not very much fun, chasing around under this Invisibility Cloak in the pouring rain, and all he does is go into the laundromat. It's ridiculous.'

Both were silent for a moment, looking at the laundromat into which their quarry had walked. When Snape had left the League office in Aldershot, they had followed him, invisibly, through the cold autumn streets, almost losing him several times, and their nerves were twanging.

'Let's have a closer look.' They leapt to one side as a young woman almost pushed her pram into them, and she looked oddly at the apparently empty space as Sirius failed to suppress a yelp.

'You'd have thought we'd have got the hang of this two people in one

cloak thing by now, really,' said Sirius when she was gone. 'Do you have to tread on my feet all the time?'

They reached the dirty plate glass of the laundromat window. Their reflection appeared, dim and misty, in the window. Sirius swore, and pulled James back again. From a safe distance, both looked in.

'I tell you, he's just doing his laundry like everyone else,' said James after a second.

'No â€" wait. Who's that he's talking to?'

'That man? I can't really see properly.'

James and Sirius watched for a moment. 'Look, you stay out here. I'll take the Cloak and go in,' suggested James resignedly.

Sirius nodded, then realising he was invisible, said, 'Yes, okay. I'll keep out of sight.'

They walked awkwardly into an empty bus shelter. There, Sirius pulled himself free of the Cloak. James went back out into the pouring rain, making sure the Cloak was covering all of him.

He loitered around the door to the laundromat until a harassed-looking woman came out, hauling a bag of clean clothes with her. Then James ducked in, and moved carefully to where the two men were standing, ostensibly doing their laundry. With a gasp, he recognised the man Severus Snape was talking to as Lucius Malfoy. They both looked very out of place in the run-down Muggle laundromat.

Though he was barely three metres away, he could not hear a single word. Narrowing his eyes a little, he realised that they must be using a spell of some sort to blanket out their conversation. He moved closer. The spell was extremely powerful, and he felt as though he had walked into a glass wall. Both men looked suspiciously at the place where he stood, and Malfoy stepped forwards. James sprang back just in time, but knocked over a chair with a resounding crash.

Horrified, he fled from the laundromat as Snape and Malfoy looked around very intently and Snape began to murmur a spell.

Sirius was lounging in the bus stop on his own, tapping his fingers on the plastic bench. He gave a yelp as the invisible James clutched at his arm.

'What the â€" is that you, James?'

'Yes. Come on, we can't stay here.' James flung the invisibility cloak around Sirius, and half-dragged him down the street, ducking between pedestrians. Malfoy and Snape were emerging from the laundromat, looking up and down the road with tense and angry expressions on their faces.

They did not stop running until they reached Remus' little flat. James pounded on the door.

Remus pulled it open and looked around in puzzlement. 'Oh â€" take

off the Cloak, you idiots,' he said as he realised. Sirius stepped out, followed by James. 'What happened?' Both were puffing for breath. 'Come and sit down,' he added.

They went into the sitting room and collapsed onto the sofa.

'He was meeting Lucius Malfoy, in the laundromat. They were using a blanketing charm, so I couldn't hear what he was saying,' explained James when he could speak.

Both Sirius and Remus gasped. 'I knew it! I always thought he was a traitor. Never trust a Slytherin, that's what I say,' spat Sirius. 'Sneaking, sly, faithless â€| why Dumbledore ever asked him to be part of the League I'll never understand.'

Remus was nodding. 'You know I don't like him â€| but Sirius is right. What are we going to do?'

'Go and tear him apart,' Sirius snarled. 'Anything else is too good for him. Betraying Dumbledore â€| all this time, he's been working for Voldemort.'

James shook his head. 'I think we shouldn't waste any time on him. We should go straight to Professor Dumbledore and tell him.'

'Yes, that would be better,' said Remus. 'I know you're raring for a fight, Sirius, but this is more sensible.'

With a heavy sigh, Sirius agreed. 'If I'm outvoted.'

'Well, then, we'll go first thing tomorrow.'

Remus sighed. 'Look, I think you'll have to leave in a few moments. It's full moon tonight, you know. If you go tomorrow, I won't be able to come.'

James hesitated a moment. 'I hope you don't mind, Moony, but I think we have to tell Dumbledore straight away.'

'Of course,' agreed Remus promptly. He sighed and leaned back in the chair.

'I guess we'll be going now,' said Sirius. 'See you around.'

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'Is Professor Dumbledore in?' James and Sirius were standing together on the steps leading up to the main entrance of the castle. Professor McGonagall nodded. 'He's in his office. Why? Is there a problem?'

'Sorry, I think we'd better talk to Dumbledore first,' said Sirius with a winning smile. Minerva felt her face return it almost of its own accord.

'Get on with you, then.'

James and Sirius went up the twisting passages without trouble. 'Heffalump!' said Sirius to the gargoyle, and the wall opened to reveal a steep narrow staircase. James led the way, and knocked on

the door at the top.

'Come in!'

Dumbledore was sitting in his armchair, a pile of papers beside him. Without looking up, he motioned them to a seat and carried on flipping through the papers. He pulled out half a dozen and flung them into the fire and then turned to Sirius and James.

'Right, sorry about the wait. Now, what can I do for you two? How are things getting on? Lily doing well?'

James gave a foolish smile. 'She's very well indeed.'

'And the wedding? Have you fixed a date yet?'

'Well, Lily wants it to be in May, so I think sometime then. We'd be delighted if you'd come.'

Sirius raised a hand. 'Important as all this is, it's not what we've come about.' He shot James a glance.

'Well, then, to business,' said Dumbledore cheerfully. 'Is there a problem?'

Sirius nodded to James.

'Well, sir, it's kind of a long story. Last month, while Sirius was with Remus, I was working on my own at the house in Aldershot — you know, one of the League places — and I overheard rather an odd conversation from downstairs. I could only hear half of it, because it was on one of those Muggle telephones, but it sounded a bit suspicious.' He hesitated. 'This person was talking about the office in Diagon Alley, telling someone the codes and stuff. And the next day we heard that Voldemort had got in there somehow. It was pretty lucky that they didn't get anything useful. Anyhow, I didn't want to tell you at first, because I didn't like to — to make accusations, you know, but Sirius and Remus and I kept an eye out for a while, and we noticed the same thing happening several times. And so we thought you should know.'

'So I told Sirius, and we followed this person when he went off somewhere, and he discovered that he was meeting with one of Voldemort's followers. Sirius wanted to challenge him, but I thought it would be better if we came to you.'

Dumbledore looked at James' serious expression calmly. 'And who is this mysterious person?'

'Severus Snape,' spat Sirius coldly.

Dumbledore was silent for a while. Then he took a deep breath and said, 'Have you mentioned these suspicions to anyone else?'

'Well, Remus, of course. He would have come today, but he's feeling ill — it was full moon last night, and we didn't want to wait any longer. But we haven't told anyone apart from him. Though Sirius wanted to —'

Dumbledore nodded slowly, and then made up his mind.

'It's good to see some people with their eyes open. You have been working very hard indeed.' He looked at them flushed with pride at his praise.

'Unfortunately, you've worked far too hard. Severus has my complete confidence.' He ignored their outraged splutters and carried on. 'Now, what I'm going to tell you, and what I want you to tell Remus, is utterly secret. I know you are trustworthy, but this is extremely important. If it gets out, Severus' life could be at risk.' Sirius could not suppress a wry smile at this.

'I know you are " not friendly with him, but listen to me. Severus is working as a double agent for us. He is feeding the Dark Side carefully chosen information, which is sometimes true, sometimes false. It will not help them, and it is extremely useful to us in anticipating their next move. It is a very dangerous job for him, and I trust you will not endanger him any further by allowing this information to reach anyone else.'

As he spoke, James and Sirius looked first dismayed, and then incredulous.

'You mean " you knew all along? What a waste!' said Sirius. 'Are there any others, before we start suspecting some of the other members of the League?'

Dumbledore laughed. 'No, only Severus; if you catch anyone else red-handed, please do tell me. There have been a few things leaked that I didn't think the Dark Side could have found out about on their own. But don't tell anyone else, please. You did the right thing in coming straight to me.'

James sighed. 'Well, I suppose it's better this way. But we were so _sure_ ". Well, never mind. Sorry for wasting your time, Professor.' He and Sirius stood up.

'Thank you for calling. It's not often I get to see you. But please do keep this to yourself. Severus' job may be one you don't particularly like, but treat him as you would normally. Don't do anything that might arouse suspicion about him. And I want to hear more about that wedding invitation, James.'

Smiling, James and Sirius left.

'Honestly, I might have known,' said Sirius exasperatedly. 'It's just Snape all over. We spend weeks on this, and it turns out we're all wrong.'

James looked pensive. 'I don't know " I mean, d'you think you'd have the guts to do what he's doing? Pretend to work with Voldemort and his people, when if you slip up once, you've had it? I wouldn't like to be doing that, myself.'

Sirius snorted. 'Sure, but you could do it if you wanted. It's exactly Snape's type of thing, isn't it? Sneaking around, peeking in corners, telling tales and generally making a nuisance of himself. Clever of Dumbledore, to work out a way to use him like this.'

'Well, at least he's not a traitor.'

'Hmm.'

THE END

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You know what I'm going to ask you to do now. Please?

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Blaise

28th January

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End
file.